

# **UNDERHILL TOWN PROFILE**

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# THE GEOLOGY

## ***The Geographic Setting***

One factor that makes Underhill unique is its geographic setting. The town is situated in the Green Mountain Range, the “rock rib” of Vermont, and the town boundary includes the undeveloped western slope of Mount Mansfield, at an elevation of 4,393 feet above sea level, the highest mountain in the state.

## ***The Physical Geography***

The physical geography distinguishes Underhill from other towns in the county and neighboring communities. The layout of parallel north-south trending mountains and valleys has severely limited the development of roads, particularly those suitable for modern automobile traffic. In the days of travel by horse and wagon when people stayed home during winter snows and mud season and there were no school buses, there were some seasonal connecting roads across the mountains which not only linked different parts of Underhill, but provided access to the neighboring towns of Westford, Bolton and Stowe, as well. Not only is there now no direct highway between Underhill and Stowe or Bolton or Westford, but the eastern part of town paralleling Mount Mansfield and known as Underhill Center is connected to the western part of town by a single east-west road. The two parts of Underhill are almost like separate towns. In the western part of town, VT 15 does provide a transportation artery both for through traffic and for the Underhill roads which feed into it, but the feeder roads are defined by parallel hills which separate them from each other and there is limited interconnection. (Map B, Transportation) Historically, Underhill never grew around a single town center as its civic focus. From the beginning of settlement the population ranged out through the isolated valleys along the rivers and streams. (Map G, dated 1868)

In contrast, the neighboring town of Jericho has a broad area of shallow, rolling topography and neighboring Westford is largely a dissected upland. These towns and the Chittenden County towns in the flat-lying Champlain Valley developed interconnecting road networks which provided community cohesion. Though neighboring Bolton, Cambridge and Stowe share with Underhill a geographic setting in the Green Mountains, Cambridge includes the agriculturally rich and unifying floodplain of the Lamoille River. Bolton and Richmond share the Winooski River floodplain; Stowe has the Waterbury River floodplain. None of the other Green Mountain towns in Chittenden County have quite the limiting physiography of Underhill.

The parallel mountain and valley system of Underhill Center can be spectacularly viewed from neighboring Cambridge on the hill by the Bassett Farm on Bryce Road. Looking south, Pleasant Valley is bounded by Mount Mansfield and Macomber Mountain; the valley view sweeps down to the profile of Camels Hump in the distance. The Irish Settlement valley is bounded by Macomber Mountain and Flynn Hill. It is easy to see why these valleys are wind tunnels, subject to serious snow drifting in the winter. (Gales have been clocked as high as 80 mph). The parallel hills and stream valleys that characterize all of Underhill are natural “greenbelts” and wildlife corridors.

## ***Formation of the Green Mountains***

The underlying bedrock in Underhill is also a limiting factor in the development of the town. In order to understand the nature of the problem, it is necessary to realize how the rock was formed and how the Green Mountains were created. The contours of the Green Mountains have been determined by the nature of the folds and fractures which developed as the mountains were being formed in ancient geologic times. The mountains are old on the geologic time table, having been

created in the Cambrian - Ordovician period of the Paleozoic era. Even millions of years before the Green Mountains were formed there were earlier mountains which were eroded by ancient rivers which carried fine-grained sediments of mud and silt and deposited them in a shallow sea somewhere in the area of what is now eastern Vermont. These sediments accumulated to a thickness of many hundreds of feet and over the millennia consolidated into hard, rather nondescript sedimentary rocks called greywacke, siltstone and shale. Then sometime on the order of 350 million years ago tremendous forces in the earth southeast of the ancient sea began to thrust up the massive layers of sedimentary rocks, crumpling and folding them to form the Green Mountain range.

Unlike volcanic mountains, which can sometimes even be created while men are watching (as in recent times in Mexico and Iceland), folded mountains are formed over long periods of time. The tremendous heat and pressure associated with the mountain-building forces which created the Green Mountains caused the sedimentary rocks of which they were being formed to become plastic. The chemical elements in the particles of mud and clay of the sedimentary rocks became rearranged and re-crystallized as new minerals, mostly platy types, such as mica and chlorite, with some associated quartz and feldspar. The great pressures forced the mineral platelets parallel to each other, giving the newly formed rocks a layered appearance and an easy direction of splitting. The rocks are called schist, from a word which means splitting. (Generically they are metamorphic rocks, a term coined from the words “meta”, meaning change, and “morph” or form.)

Unlike sedimentary rocks or igneous rocks such as granite, which are formed by cooling from a molten state, metamorphic rocks are dense and non-porous. They are also characterized by the presence of many fine cracks and larger fractures.

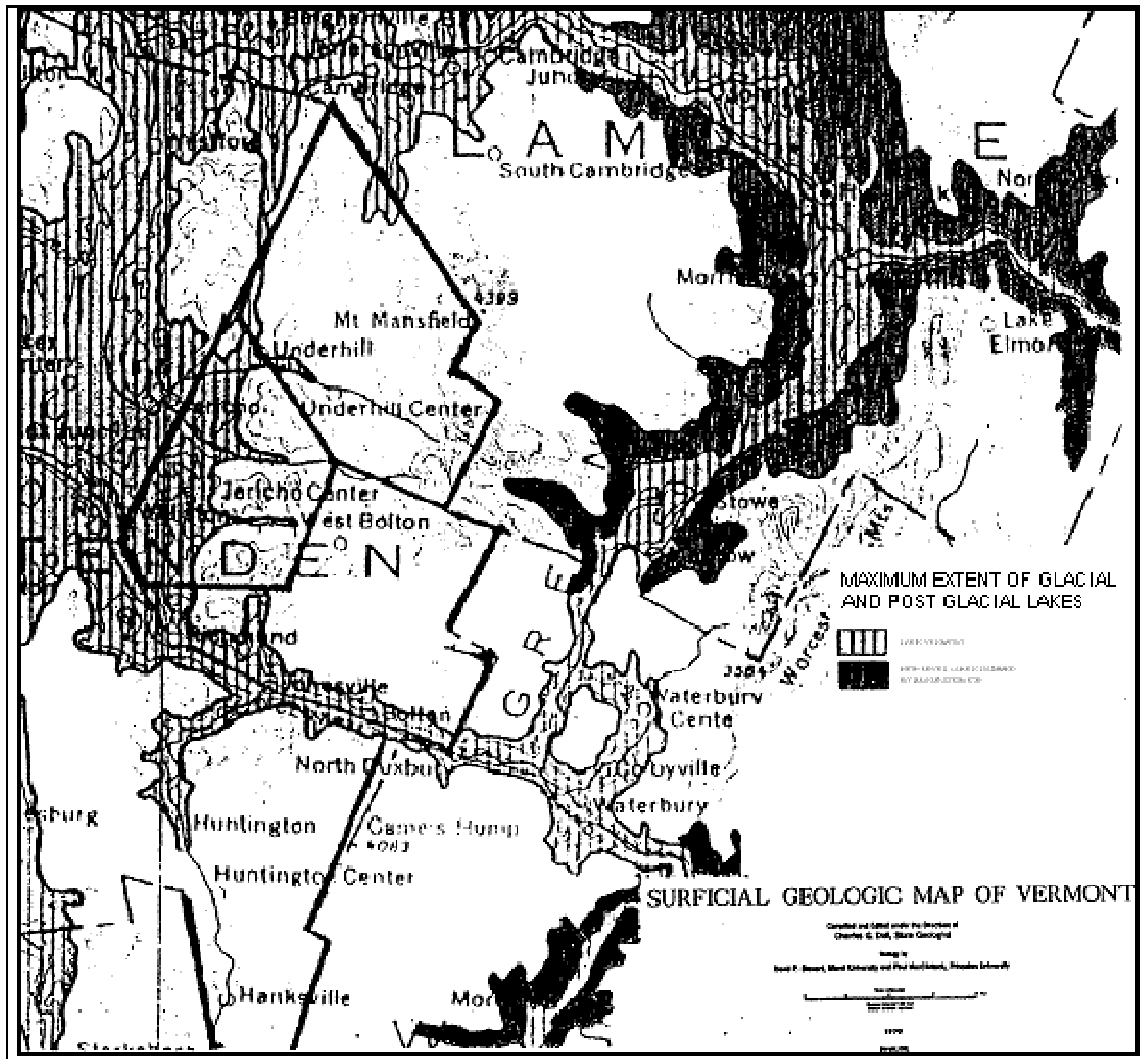
The mineral content and appearance of the metamorphic schist which forms the Green Mountains varies somewhat along the length of the range and various names have been given to the rock in different places. In Underhill, the schist is aptly called the Underhill Formation. It forms the cliffs at Smuggler’s Notch and the bare rock faces along the crests of the mountains. Huge fractures in the schist have formed the cliffs which created the contour of Mt Mansfield, known as “ The Sleeping Giant”. (The forehead, nose and chin of the giant are more distinct when viewed from the aspect in Stowe than on the Underhill side.) Other fractures in the rock formation are subject to weathering, especially frost action, which periodically causes massive sections to break off and create terrifying rock slides. (As recently as 1983 such a slide closed the road through Smuggler’s Notch. A jogger observed the crash and was miraculously spared.) The Underhill Formation is a shiny, blue-green platy rock, sometimes sprinkled with dark red garnets. It weathers into flat stones which are valued for use as steps, walks and patios. Unexposed to the weather the schist is dense and hard, as anyone who has had to blast through it will attest, but when it is subject to weathering, water can infiltrate the cleavage in the platy minerals and the tiny cracks in the rock, leading eventually to crumbling of the material into particles.

On Metcalf and Hedgehog Hill and toward VT 15 in Underhill the rocks show some traces of their original sedimentary layering and texture. Narrow lenses or “inliers” of other formations which are found in larger amounts north of Underhill, in particular, a dark, platy metamorphic rock called phyllite, can be observed along Poker Hill Road and Pleasant Valley Road.

## ***Surficial geology***

The physical geography of Underhill, created by the mountain formation and subsequent erosion was also influential in the development of the surficial geology, or soil cover. The most important geologic event in Vermont since the creation of the Green Mountains, among the oldest mountains in the world, was the Pleistocene ice age. The thick mantle of ice, miles high, covered all of the northern part of the continent. As it moved over the landscape it smoothed off mountaintops, scoured the valleys and carried an assortment of rock debris at its base that it

compacted as it traveled. The last of the ice age was barely 10,000 years ago, a blink-of-an-eye on the geologic time scale. When the ice melted, it created in the area of northern Vermont an enormous lake, called by geologists, Lake Vermont. (At one stage the lake was connected to the ocean, as the presence of marine fossils indicates.) Sediments became stratified as they settled in the large lake. When the water receded to the level of the present Lake Champlain and the land finally dried out, the fertile Champlain Valley was created. The great river systems and the smaller tributary streams also flooded to high levels and produced rich, stratified agricultural soils.



A map showing the maximum extent of the glacial and postglacial flooding in the area of Chittenden County is shown in the figure above. The map was enlarged from the accessory map on the 1970 Surficial Geologic Map of Vermont. The location of Underhill has been sketched on the map and, for comparison, Jericho is also shown. While most of the towns to the west of Underhill, including Jericho, received the bounty of prime agricultural soils, Underhill with its higher elevations, stood above the flood. Only small areas in the floodplains of the Browns River, the Creek, Seymour River and Settlement Brook developed fertile agricultural soils. On the elevations which were above the flood the glacier melted back and left in situ the rock debris which it had gathered as it moved along from the north. This material, called glacial till by geologists and fragipan by soils scientists, is known by the laymen who have had to work it as

hardpan. It consists of highly compacted, finely pulverized rock material and includes pebbles, stones and boulders of all sizes. Most of the material is from “away”, someplace to the north. (On Stevensville Road in Underhill, across from the former Underhill Ski Bowl, there are elephant-size boulders of pillow basalt, an unusual rock whose parent formation can be found near Lake Memphramagog on the Canadian border. Such free-standing boulders are called glacial erratics.) The Surficial Geologic Map of Vermont shows that most of the state is covered by glacial till. It is certainly the dominating surficial cover in Underhill. Heroic efforts were made by early settlers to clear the rocks from the till, (hence the ubiquitous stone walls), and to cultivate the inhospitable soils. Such farms were not viable and over the years have been abandoned. Fortunately, several of the older farms which are located in the small areas of Underhill which do have prime agricultural soils are still being farmed. (Sugarbush Farm along the Seymour River straddles the Cambridge border and is administered by the American Farmland Trust.) Impermeable glacial till does not lend itself to modern residential development that, unlike earlier times, requires ample running water and elaborate septic disposal systems. On land covered by glacial till the state health regulations require artificial (and expensive) mound or alternative systems for sewage disposal. Glacial till is also an unfortunate road base. Except for the River Road, all of the town roads in Underhill are under laid by such material. The impermeability of the till, along with the presence of many underground springs, creates expensive road maintenance problems. Frost heaves in the Underhill section of the paved Pleasant Valley Road are hazardous. (By contrast, when the road reaches Cambridge the underlying stratified soils of the Seymour River floodplain provide an adequate base and the road immediately smoothes out.) The mud season frustrations of the dirt roads are legendary. Replacement or overlayment of the till by an adequate thickness of gravel is costly and the town has to approach mitigation of the problems incrementally.

### ***The vulnerable ground water aquifers***

The metamorphic schist which forms the bedrock of Underhill is an important groundwater recharge aquifer, holding water in the cracks and providing storage which can be tapped for wells. The aquifer is extremely vulnerable to pollution because of the many interconnecting cracks in the rocks. Unlike porous materials, such as sand and gravels, in which bacterial pollution can be filtered over relatively short distances, polluted water can travel for miles through the cracks in the schist, contaminating wells far from the source of the problem. The Soil and Water Conservation Zoning District in Underhill was created to protect this vulnerable ground water environment.

An entirely different kind of ground water aquifer was formed in the area around the village of Underhill Center as the residual glacial ice was retreating from Mount Mansfield. The Browns River originates high on Mt Mansfield. Its tributaries, Stevensville Brook, Clay Brook, Harvey Brook and Mill Brook (called Steinhour Brook in the Vermont Atlas) also form on the mountain and fan down to join the Browns River in the valley of Underhill Center. As the glacial ice melted back, the mountain streams flooded and sediments were relatively stratified along the banks in piles of sand and gravel called “kame terraces”. This fan shaped area of softly contoured hills characterizes the lower slopes of Mount Mansfield. The very porous sands and gravels constitute an important ground water aquifer environment and is protected in the Underhill Zoning by-laws as the Water Conservation District. Although the gravel environment has better purifying characteristics than the bedrock, it is so porous that the Soil Conservation Service now describes the soils as “flashy” and recommends care in the installation of septic systems.

### ***The Scenery***

Nebraska Notch, south of Mount Mansfield, was carved by the erosive action of an ancient stream between Mount Dewey and Mount Clark. When the Town of Mansfield existed,

encompassing the upper elevations on both sides of the mountain, a road was cut through the gap in the mountains to provide access between the two parts of the town. When the unmanageable arrangement was dissolved, the unused road became a trail, much used today by hikers and skiers. Trees grow almost to the summit of the mountains, which are green much of the year. They are “comfortable mountains” which can be enjoyed by hikers, no elaborate mountaineering equipment is required. The “Long Trail” traverses the Green Mountains and continues southward along the greater Appalachian chain of which they are a part.

In difficult times one often hears the remark, “You can’t eat the scenery.” Yet, despite the hardships encountered in the early days in Underhill, the settlers must have appreciated the scenic beauty around them, for many of the oldest farmsteads were sited to capture the most spectacular panoramic views. Underhill abounds not only in scenic vistas, but in isolated ravines and gorges where the brooks have sculptured the easily eroded schists and only the gurgling of the water is heard. On the eastern side of town nearly every road provides its own special view of Mount Mansfield. On the western side of town the view sweeps across Lake Champlain to the Adirondacks in the distance. An understanding of the special combination of geologic factors that have created the scenic features in Underhill can enhance appreciation for the uniqueness of the legacy we enjoy.

## **THE LANDSCAPE**

The geologic history, natural history and social history of Underhill are interrelated. The parallel hills and valleys were developed during the folding of the mountains, carved by the rivers and sculpted by the glacier. This physiography, along with the marked variations in elevation and the heritage of glacial deposits, have determined the plant life, wildlife and mineral resources of the town.

### ***Rivers, Streams and Wetlands***

The major stream in Underhill is the Browns River, a tributary of the Lamoille River. It begins on Mount Mansfield and is joined in the valley of Underhill Center by Stevensville Brook and Clay Brook, which also begin their journey high on the mountain. The three streams form a fan-shaped watershed. Harvey Brook, Cranes Brook and Mill Brook, which drain the lower hillsides, also join the Browns River in the village of Underhill Center, creating special problems in the population center, due to a high ground water level and vulnerability to flooding. It then flows parallel to South Hill and is joined in Jericho by the Creek, a slow flowing stream paralleling VT 15 which drains the slopes of Metcalfe and McLean hills on the western side of Underhill. The Browns River swings north through Essex and Westford and drains into the Lamoille River at Fairfax. Thus, the water that collects on Mount Mansfield eventually flows into Lake Champlain. At one time there was a small settlement called Stevensville on Mount Mansfield which grew up at falls in the Stevensville Brook where there was a cheesebox factory. Traces of the factory foundation remain, but few of the houses are standing and the handsome schoolhouse was destroyed by an arsonist. Higher up, Stevensville Brook supported a seasonal sawmill; Browns River, Cranes Brook and Mill Brook also had sawmills. Clay Brook is aptly named, for it has formed a steep ravine through a deep stratification of clay. The banks are unstable and slippery and often give way, carrying huge trees that fall across the brook.

The Seymour River, which flows directly into the Lamoille River in Cambridge, created the rich agricultural Pleasant Valley, mostly in Cambridge, partly in Underhill. In North Underhill the Beaver Brook drains Metcalfe Hill and flows across Westford into the Lamoille River.

When viewed from the air, a dominating feature of the landscape is the broad wetland of the Creek, which flows south along VT 15 through Underhill. It joins the Browns River in Jericho and is an important floodway for the Browns River watershed. The Browns River meanders through a broad floodplain along the River Road, often changing its course during spring floods.

The small farming area along the River Road is the major heritage of the post glacial flooding in Underhill, the only concentrated area of prime agricultural soils in town, a heritage which should be preserved.

Wetlands are areas that are inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support significant vegetation or aquatic life that depend on saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction.

Wetlands are now recognized as serving important functions.

- They protect waterways and water quality by providing water storage for floodwater and storm runoff, thus reducing the severity of flooding;
- They protect surface and ground water resources through chemical reactions, nutrient uptake and sediment filtration;
- They control erosion with a protective cover of vegetation.
- They provide habitat for wildlife, including rare animals, migratory waterfowl and songbirds.
- They provide economic benefits by providing cover or feeding, spawning and nursery habitat for deer, bear and many species of game birds and fish.

There are many kinds of wetlands in Underhill, including the rare habitat at the crest of Mount Mansfield. Protection of wetlands and their functions, including National Wetlands Inventory mapped wetlands, is a major thrust of town regulations. (See map H)

## ***The Woodlands***

The virgin forests on Mount Mansfield and its foothills were cleared to fuel shipping on Lake Champlain; the logs were cut at the sawmills that dotted almost every mountain stream. When the trees were gone the stumped land was sold to hardy immigrants who established farms on the hillsides and amazingly far up on Mount Mansfield. Wildlife that depended upon forest cover became scarce. Beavers especially declined in numbers due to trapping and loss of habitat.

Most of the small hillside farms failed to prosper and in the early 1900's many were bought for vacation homes. Caught up in the conservation ethic, the seasonal residents planted stands of trees, mostly pines and spruces. The State of Vermont participated by donating seedlings.

Photographs of Mount Mansfield taken in the late forties show small trees beginning to green up the slopes that had been cleared. Unfortunately, monocultural planting is vulnerable and during the 1950's stand after stand of white pines in the northeast were lost to the blight of blister rust, carried on currant and gooseberry bushes. Underhill lost many white pines. The mature white pine stands seen today actually date from more recent plantings in the fifties after the blight had passed. In addition, many of the non-indigenous red pines were plagued by "ring rot".

The natural reforestation was more successful. Today Mount Mansfield and the Town of Underhill, in spite of residential development, look much more like the territory that greeted the early settlers. When viewed from the air, there is a stark contrast between the appearance of Mount Mansfield on the Stowe and Underhill sides. The Underhill slope is undeveloped and no building is allowed above 1500 feet.

The variation in elevation (from about 500' to 4200') results in a wide range of climate zones and plant communities. The classic Northern Hardwood Forest predominates: maples, beech, birch, hemlock and white pine. At about 2500' on Mount Mansfield and on the tops of higher foothills transitional forest, which includes yellow birch and painted trillium, can be found. At higher elevations is the spruce fir forest community, which has figured in the acid rain research conducted by the University of Vermont. The forests of Underhill are again being logged, this time under the oversight of careful forest management. At upper elevations, The Mount Mansfield State Forest is logged under management of the State Department of Forests and Parks. Some private lands in Underhill are logged commercially; many are under forest management in one of the Town or State current use programs. In addition, there are many stands of sugar



maples, planted and managed over the years in conjunction with farming operations, which still provide income for maple syrup producers.

In addition to the many smaller privately owned plots, Underhill has three publicly owned forests.

#### **Underhill State Park**

Part of the 34,000-acre Vermont State Forest system, the park is open from mid-May through Columbus Day and provides access to the recreational facilities of the forest.

#### **UVM's Mount Mansfield Natural Area**

This area has the largest alpine tundra in Vermont as well as sub-alpine areas and alpine bogs. It contains some of the rarest and fragile plants in Vermont.

#### **UVM's Proctor Research Center**

Maple research at UVM began in the 1890s and has centered on the sugar maple tree. The sugar bush at Proctor has about 1800 taps as well as thousands of young trees. It is used as a classroom for scientists, students and maple sugar producers.

### ***Wildlife Habitats***

Reforestation has influenced the return of wildlife to Underhill and protection of the habitats is a significant aspect of town regulations. Beavers are again common. The moose population has increased and the shy black bear den along the higher ridges, on Flynn Hill in particular. Fishers were introduced in the early 70's to control a burgeoning porcupine population, which especially enjoyed the glue used in exterior plywood and were becoming a menace. Otters and even bobcats have been observed, in addition to the more common white tailed deer, fox, raccoon and mink. The system of parallel hills in Underhill constitutes natural greenbelts. Large sections of land reach from Cambridge to Jericho, providing unhindered movement of animals along the ridgeline travel corridors. Steep, inaccessible ravines and gorges in the easily weathered bedrock are also important wildlife sanctuaries. Map H shows critical deeryards identified by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. These are largely stands of conifers that provide winter habitat, often found on south facing or protected hillsides. Deer are sensitive to disturbance by dogs and vehicles and the deeryards require a buffer zone.

### ***Floodplains***

A Flood Hazard Area is an area that is statistically likely to be inundated by a flood every 100 years. A floodway is the channel of a river and the adjacent land area that must be reserved to discharge the 100 year flood without accumulatively increasing the water elevation more than one foot. Vegetation in the floodway helps protect the riverbanks from erosion during floods, slows the movement of water, filters sediment and debris and provides important wildlife habitat throughout the year. Maps showing the Flood Hazard Areas as determined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are on file at town hall. Building is severely restricted in these areas and Flood Hazard insurance is required for all buildings.

### ***Fragile areas***

The remnants of tundra and associated flora found at the summit of Mount Mansfield are a heritage of the Pleistocene glacier. Robert Hagerman has described this special and fragile habitat in his book, "Mansfield, The Story of Vermont's Loftiest Mountain". There are at least 40 species of plant life in the area, some very rare. The tundra is extremely vulnerable and if disturbed or compacted will never recover; the special plant life will be destroyed. Unfortunately, some has already been ruined by hikers and by motorized vehicles. Elsewhere on the summit are several small peat bogs where some of the rarest plants in the state are found. One bog is 40 inches deep and is so acid that organic matter that has fallen in does not decompose. It provides a fossil record

of everything that has grown there since the bog was formed about 3000 years ago. Several of these areas have been designated critical sites by the Vermont Natural Heritage program.

## SOME HISTORY

### ***Before settlement***

In 1741 George III of England established the crown colony of New Hampshire, fixed its present-day boundaries and installed one Benning Wentworth at its head. Wentworth, as governor, was put in charge of Fort Dummer, then a remote outpost planted on the opposite (west) bank of the Connecticut River. Using this miniscule toehold, Wentworth proclaimed jurisdiction over the vast, largely unexplored “no man’s land” beyond the Connecticut recently gained in the historic ceding of French Canada to Britain. Actually, New York was first promised this territory. But Wentworth embarked upon an aggressive campaign, chartering townships from Massachusetts northward, thereby sowing an enduring legacy of land-grabbing and real estate controversies that would characterize the original settlement of Vermont, known then as the Hampshire Grants. Within twenty years all the prime agricultural soils right up through the Champlain Valley were bought up by wholesale land developers (Ira and Ethan Allen, notably, among them) looking for a tidy return off a burgeoning colonial population. Remaining marginal farmland lay in hill country. Records show that on June 8, 1763, Wentworth issued a charter containing thirty-six square miles (23,040 acres) of virgin wilderness to a group of sixty-five investors, one of whom was named Benjamin Underhill. This land went for exactly one cent per acre. On this same day Westford, Stowe and the now extinct township of Mansfield were chartered in different syndicates comprising many of the same shareholders. Jericho had been born the day before. These original owners never intended personally to clear this frontier. They were land speculators. Most joined several standard sixty-five-member coalitions purchasing thirty-six square miles at a penny an acre. Likely none ever physically visited their holdings any more than a contemporary market trader would bother inspecting some corporate plant. In this New World exploitable wilderness was everywhere just over the perceived horizon. It was a brisk commodity—parcelled up, shuffled about and horse-traded off to young, hardy, gullible frontierspeople desperate for a new beginning someplace.

In the following year of 1764 the Hampshire Grants, now a gridwork of 131 separate townships, were mostly all sold off, though few settlers had actually arrived. But by year’s end, following decades of dispute, King George himself finally ruled that this whole (literal) shooting match west of the Connecticut River had all along belonged to New York, not New Hampshire. Benning Wentworth’s scheme swiftly unravelled and he eventually resigned under scandal. New York began selling its own charters directly adverse to the so-called “Wentworthless” claims. In fact, in 1776 New York sold a tract of land to one Frederick Rhinelander of New York City, which included parts of Milton, Westford and Underhill. But in the tempestuous months preceding the outbreak of revolution, entrenched Hampshire Grantees in first-settled areas like Guilford and Bennington (named after you-know-who) fended off arriving homesteaders armed under New York authority. In fact, the Green Mountain Boys of Revolutionary legend originally banded to fight not British soldiers, but Yorkers—fellow settlers.

Thus, for pioneers contemplating “going into the Grants” during the 1760s and 1770s migration north offered the terrifying prospect of colonizing territory ravaged by dispute and revolution. A breed apart, those lost souls who dared stepping into this wilderness faced a pantheon of nemeses: native Abnaki, French trappers, British soldiers, New York militia, Green Mountain vigilantes, not to mention starvation, wild animals and brutal cold. [\[1\]](#) Needless to say, Benjamin Underhill and his peers never saw much quick profit. It would take decades more for this hill country to start populating.

On September 12, 1785, a group of landed gentry gathered at the home of one Abraham Underhill (presumably a relative of Benjamin) in Dorset, Vermont. This was the first formal meeting of these sixty-five original shareholders—or their survivors—who twenty-two years earlier had

speculated, sight unseen, on a chunk of uninhabited wilderness lying somewhere nine days' walk north of them. Much had transpired over those intervening years. New York, Massachusetts and New Hampshire were now constituents in the new, thirteen-member federation. Although the Green Mountain Boys had valiantly supported the War of Independence, the Continental Congress snubbed their membership mainly out of deference to the powerful New York delegation still smarting from rivalry and the loss of substantial charter fees to Wentworth. But residents of the Grants stood defiant, proclaimed themselves a sovereign nation, drafted their own Declaration of Independence and Constitution, and even minted their own currency. Eventually they adopted the name: Vermont. Finally, in 1785 they laid to rest the quarter-century of antagonism by paying off New York and legitimizing Wentworth's originally bogus charters. In that year the ruggedly self-reliant Republic of Vermont was finally poised for prosperity—and for inevitable admission, six years later, into the Union as the fourteenth State.

There was certainly some urgency to the 1785 shareholders meeting at Mr. Underhill's home in Dorset. Now that the great feud was finally over, a land rush was on and civilization was swiftly pushing back the frontier. Pioneers had already settled on the Browns and Lamoille River flatlands. So a committee of three was appointed to dispatch a surveyor posthaste. "Surveying" the Vermont wilderness in 1785 entailed nothing of today's professionalism. It was a combination of bush-whacking, dead reckoning, eye-balling and much bare-fisted negotiation with sundry squatters, neighbors and adverse claimants in a conspicuous grab for the best cropland. By the time this surveying team arrived, the choicest alluvial pickings had already been staked by surrounding townships.<sup>[2]</sup>

## ***Early settlement***

The earliest settlers in Underhill proper arrived the following spring of 1786. Their lots encompassed the gateway area we now call the Flats. More folks gradually filtered in and cleared along the foot trail to Cambridge. This path became a wagon road following the line of least resistance up the route we now call Poker Hill Road. In 1791 Vermont became a State, and the first official U.S. Census records Vermont as having a population of 85,000. Guilford, the largest town, had 2,400; Underhill had 65. By the next census of 1800, nine years later, Underhill's population nearly quadrupled.

From the turn of the nineteenth century onward the stream of homesteaders to Underhill increased. From the start the primary industry was logging.<sup>[3]</sup> The virgin forest was cleared, lumber was cut for homes, schools, churches, taverns, barns, fences, etc. Saw mills clustered around every available stream site and ran day and night during Spring thaw. People were dispersed across a multitude of logging camps and small, subsistence farms. Travel was minimal and always on foot; life was mind-numbingly parochial. These scattered homesteads typically revolved around a local neighborhood or "settlement," featuring a meeting house with shipping post and cemetery, perhaps a mill, store, or tavern, always a one-room schoolhouse.

Potato starch and potash refineries, grain mills, tanneries, stores and blacksmiths sprang up, first along Poker Hill, then up the Browns River and Pleasant Valley. In 1839 the sparsely inhabited logging township of Mansfield straddling the mountain was dissolved by State legislation, and the summit with the entire western slope (12 square miles or exactly one-third) was given to Underhill, the eastern two-thirds to Stowe.

## ***The Civil War***

The war between the States was a cataclysmic event in the history of Vermont and Underhill. Chroniclers agree the most rabid abolitionism flourished in the deep north. Vermonters enlisted in droves to eradicate Southern slavery and preserve the Union. More men and resources per capita were expended from Vermont than any other State. Families of twenty children were not

uncommon back then; the population base was exploding. But by that time Vermont was nearly devoid of its forests; the wilderness gone, available decent farmland confining. The Civil War accelerated the opening of the American West, like a huge plug releasing restless masses out across the fruited plain toward the next expanse of wilderness and the distant lure of gold. One local yarn explains how Nebraska Notch was named: residents of parts east streaming through the pass would announce their destination, Nebrasky.

We look back upon our forbears with nostalgia. But in reality scratching out a hardscrabble existence during those times was insufferable, especially for the upland inhabitants of Underhill. Though by the 1860s seventy-five per cent of Vermont was treeless, logging was still underway on the less accessible slopes of Mansfield and her foothills. Once the timber fell, the rough ground was left for recent arrivals to work. Today, in the remotest backwoods of Underhill we are amazed to discover rock piles, stone walls, cellar holes and other evidence of unimaginable labor. Sheep-raising was the dominant agricultural industry of the Civil War period, and Vermont was regarded as the wool capital of the world. But from that very first survey a hundred years earlier, Underhill was somehow muscled out of its proportion of rich bottomland. The remaining thin, stony, sloped, poor-draining soils were never meant for efficient production. From its inception, Underhill had always been—relative to other towns—an unwealthy and rather itinerant place. Many, many families simply gave up, gathered everything and headed west. The Census of 1870 records Underhill's highest pre-modern population at 1,655 residents. From then on it was all downhill.

### ***A village across towns***

At this population crest came an event which would influence the modern predicament of Underhill. 1877 saw the coming of the Burlington-and-Lamoille Railway, from Essex to Cambridge. Railroads are not particular respecters of town lines, and back then, municipal boundaries had not the significance of today. So, to no one's concern at the time, this station was positioned almost directly on the Underhill-Jericho town line. Though another station was built at the opposite end of Underhill, it was the Flatts depot which germinated and took on a life of its own. Here a true "population center"—a mini-metropolis! -- spread out right across the town boundary.

So while the population of Underhill township as a whole declined, the Flatts on both sides of the dividing line ballooned. Churches, stores of every variety, mills, hotels, taverns, a theater, a private boarding school, stockyards, livery stables, paved streets and a public common arose just west of the train stop. Blacksmiths, barbers, wheelwrights, a doctor, a druggist and a lawyer set up shop. As the far-flung upland settlements were losing people and importance as social, residential and economic nuclei, Underhill Flatts as the focal point of local life grew. Fifteen years after the coming of the B & L Railway the Vermont legislature granted this boomtown unique authorization to unify into one single school district the Flatts settlement on the Underhill side with the adjacent Riverside Settlement on the Jericho side. Thus was born the Underhill Incorporated District (Underhill I. D.) straddling parts of Jericho and Underhill and the source of so much frustration today.

Underhill at the turn of the century was a transforming place. As the hillside populations drained, farms and logging businesses consolidated into bigger, intensive, more efficient operations. Dairy cows supplanted sheep as Vermont soon became (and remains) the Holstein capital of the world. B & L boxcars carried in fertilizer, grain and manufactured goods and carried out lumber, leather, maple sugar, potatoes, butter and cheese.

### ***A place for recreation***

The railway helped to make Underhill an attractive vacation destination. The Halfway House, a hotel built near the current site of Underhill State Park camping area, cultivated a flourishing

business. From there guests would often hike or wagon-ride up a narrow road for an overnight at the Summit House Hotel situated on the nose of Mt. Mansfield. Several other resort hotels existed in Underhill Center. In the early part of the century many of the small mountain farms were purchased for vacation homes and Underhill Center was for many decades essentially a 'summer colony'. The 19<sup>th</sup> century grand hotels with ballrooms went into decline, replaced by simpler summer 'boarding houses'. In 1924 the first alpine ski trail on Mt. Mansfield (The Teardrop) was cleared on the Underhill side. In 1935 the Underhill Ski Bowl was started on the Egan farm with a primitive rope tow and was used by the newly formed Winter Sports Club. The ski operation thrived from 1946- 1982 under the ownership of the Dubrow family and the Underhill Ski Bowl was shown on all the maps of Vermont. It certainly was the place for the children in Underhill to enjoy the cold winters and become expert skiers - - and with an improved ski tow and lighted night skiing, it became popular with the Burlington crowd, too. It was a great community loss when the facility closed ( largely due to exorbitant increases in the cost of insurance.) The sport of cross country skiing in Vermont actually began in Underhill Center. A group of enthusiasts started clearing trails in the mid '60s and the Edgemont races were popular for many years. A longer trail was cleared all the way to Smugglers' Notch and was used for the annual 'Madonna Vasa' race. The races were discontinued in late '70s because of excess popularity; they became just too big to handle. Meanwhile, many local trails have been cleared and the sport is now highly popular all over Underhill.

From the mid '40s to the mid '60s Underhill Center was a mecca for country dances held Saturday nights at the 'Hen House' (now Wells apartments) in Underhill Center. It was entertainment for all ages and was popular with dancers from all around the area.

In the early '70s the Town bought land in Underhill Center for a recreation area and with the help of a State grant established tennis courts and a small swimming pond. A volunteer Recreation Committee was formed to oversee the facility and there are annual tennis and swimming lessons. From 1982-1998 the Connells operated an international youth hostel in their handsome barn in Underhill Center, attracting visitors from many countries.

In 1970, the time of the first Town Plan, vacation property accounted for nearly 13% of the Grand List. Over the last 30 years nearly all the seasonal homes have been converted to year- round residences. Now only 2.4% of houses is listed as vacation house.

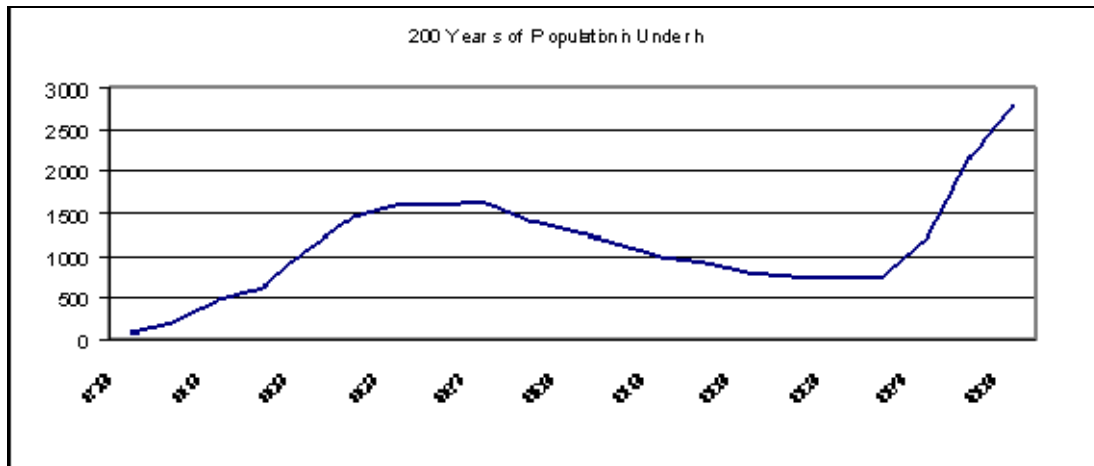
## ***Population decline***

The flush of prosperity lasted two generations before competition from America's heartland ushered the agricultural economy of the Northeast into decline. Inexorably, from the hilly regions, dairy farm after farm fell out of production. And Vermont's worked-over timber stands could scarcely vie with the expansive virgin resources of the great Northwest.

## **Loss of land**

Two factors exacerbated the population decline in Underhill as the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded: the establishment of the Mt Mansfield State Forest and Park and the Federal Underhill Artillery Range. As early as 1859 UVM had acquired stewardship of the crest of Mt Mansfield with its unique glacial leftover of tundra. In 1914, with the logging of the mountain virtually complete, Vermont began the acquisition of land on Mount Mansfield for a State Forest and Park and the initiation of programs for reforestation and recreation, absorbing some homesteads in the process. Expansion of the State Forest has continued throughout the years as land has become available through purchase from lumber companies and private gifts. In 1926 the Federal government purchased land in Underhill, Jericho and Bolton to use as an artillery range for the

Fort Ethan Allen military base in Essex Junction and summer training for college reserve officers. 1153 acres of Underhill were taken off of the tax rolls; the neighborhood called 'Hutchville' disappeared. In 1946 more land was added to the 'Range' bringing the Underhill total to 3,292 acres.



### Loss of income

When the Depression hit, commercial rail evaporated, and by 1939 the B & L stopped running. Farms were abandoned or sold off as vacation homes or hunting camps to cityfolk attracted by firesale prices, the unspoiled environment and the absence of people. Underhill became a second-home haven. The 1950 census recorded Underhill's lowest population since 1820 at less than 700 residents.

By the 50s Underhill's fifteen separate "settlement" school districts had dwindled to five, apart from the "I.D." With so few inhabitants, even five was too much. So in 1953 the five remaining districts consolidated into one, which headquartered itself in Underhill Center, thus completing the current school district configuration that some residents now regard as geographically absurd. As the town population declined, the many churches in town were hard pressed to maintain viable congregations and began to share facilities with churches in Jericho. The 'Union Church' in Underhill Center, shared by Methodist and Baptist denominations, was given up and in 1950 the building was purchased by the town of Underhill for use as a Town Hall and renovated by civic volunteers. (The new facility replaced the former Green Mountain Academy in Underhill Center, which had served as Town Hall for many years.)

Meanwhile, Chittenden County's population had been growing all the time; between 1850 and 1940 at a steady rate of 1% per year and after World War 2 at 2% per year. Between 1940 and 1980 the population doubled. Moreover, the freedom of transportation provided by the automobile liberated people from the need to build close to railroads where real estate prices were high. Dirt roads became paved highways. Renewed prosperity was around the corner.

### *Life in the early 20th century*

Although a telephone exchange had been started in the 1890s, electricity was not introduced until 1933. Many country homes were connected much later. A trip to Burlington was an excursion and not everyone made it that far. People made their own entertainment and classic Vermont humor is evident in the chronicle of events. For many years The Mansfield Women's Club provided intellectual stimulus for the ladies with book reviews and special reports. It was responsible for the Waters Library and made many other contributions to the civic life of the

community. 4H was popular with the young people providing domestic and farm-life skills. Exchange of services was the rule and most civic needs were addressed by volunteers.

### **The Civilian Conservation Corps**

During the depression years of 1933- 1942, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)<sup>[4]</sup> was active in Underhill. From their camp on Range Road, the young men were driven to the mountain where they built a campsite for the Underhill State Park and created more hiking trails. (A large segment of the Appalachian Long Trail passes through Underhill and had been cleared earlier.) During the historic blizzard of 1940, their camp almost blew away, but they turned out to help people all over town. When the program ended with the advent of WWII, the Corps was in the process of constructing a road across the Underhill side of the mountain, destination Nebraska Notch; traces of the road can still be seen on the mountainside. (The young men had created quite a social stir in the area, competing with local boys for the attention of the girls; the situation was not without some interaction...)

### **The Firing Range**

In 1948 the General Electric Company in Burlington began the manufacture of armaments and used the Range to test large guns. The whooping noise of the high tech artillery became a familiar sound in Underhill. Part of the Range was set up for training of the Vermont National Guard and units from other states as well. The sounds of small arms fire, 155mm howitzers and helicopter observation planes also became familiar. As the role of the Guard and Reserves has become more important in military strategy, the use of the range for training activities has expanded year round.

## ***Renewed prosperity***

In 1957 IBM set up a manufacturing plant in Essex Junction with tenuous roots. The venture turned out to be successful and as the years went by the commitment became more resolute. By 1968, with the expansion of manufacturing and the opening of a new engineering building, the company had completely changed the economic landscape of Chittenden County.

The completion of Interstate 89 further fueled an upturn in the economy. High-tech manufacturing and service industries blossomed, and the population suddenly soared. In the mid 60s Underhill started to grow again and to grow fast. Open land subdivided into house sites; summer homes and hunting camps converted into year-round residences.

### **Town Planning started**

Although Underhill lay on the outskirts of the immediate effected area, some of the far- sighted town citizens saw the future coming and took steps to try to control possible ill-planned housing developments. In 1961, the town authorized the appointment of a Zoning Board to write a zoning ordinance; the minimal regulations were adopted in 1963. The following year a Planning Commission was appointed. The VT Planning and Development Act (Act 250) was passed in 1968 in response to the disastrous consequences of unregulated development in the state. The legislation required the writing of a Town Plan on which to base zoning ordinances. In preparation the Underhill Planning Commission initiated a 'land use' study by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in Essex Junction and were fortunate to have the expertise of soil scientist , Robert Towne, to do the work. The first Underhill Town Plan was adopted in 1970 , along with subdivision regulations to curb the proliferation of poorly planned housing developments , which the early zoning regulations had not been able to prevent.

(Some of the early subdivisions established in the late '60s had road problems which became historical legacies). In 1973 the revised Zoning Ordinance was passed, based upon the SCCS Land Use Map using 'Critical Area Zoning' criteria. The fundamental, unchanging natural basis for the regulations has stood for 30 years, so far.



### **Town Hall was renovated**

In 1967 the population of Underhill still hovered around 700, but rapid change was coming. The Town Hall had suffered structural damage from an untended roof leak and the Town Office in the basement was woefully inadequate. A bond vote to pay for remodeling of the building was first passed and then rescinded. In desperation the Selectboard even contemplated the possibility of sharing a Town Hall and Town Manager with Jericho. Then a project to renovate the building with volunteer workers emerged and the newly formed Historical Society undertook fund raising projects to pay for the materials. It was a two- year project of Saturday workdays with citizens of all ages participating. The project was highly successful and even received recognition from the State Historical Society. In 1970 a grand town party celebrated the building rejuvenation.

### **Property taxes soared**

About the same time as the passage of Act 250, the VT Supreme Court decreed that the historical basis for tax appraisal which evaluated land use for agricultural usefulness was now unfair and appraisal would henceforth be based upon something called "Fair Market Value". This was an average number derived from recent property sales and was used to evaluate land by total acreage. In 1970 the Underhill Town listers reappraised land on this basis and the result was disastrous. Land appraisals soared, some even quadrupling. The Civil Board was overwhelmed by appraisal challenges and just about every lawyer in Burlington had a job in Underhill.... The Board revoked many of the changes and the listers took the Town to court. (The Town taxpayers had to pay for legal costs on both sides of the issue.) The upshot was that the court threw the challenge into the hands of the State Board of Appraisal, which had pressured the listers in the first place. A compromise was finally reached which allowed modifying factors to be applied to the land values, depending on location and viability for housing. But lasting damage had been done. Underhill was essentially up for sale. The Selectboard responded by setting up the first town 'Land Use Contract', which abated taxes on lands which were set aside from development for 10 years. (Although an important purpose was to protect some of the few remaining farmers from excessive taxation, several independents refused to participate.) Subsequently the State set up similar contracts. The huge pressure on land sales somewhat diminished, but the pressure of population growth in Chittenden county spread inexorably to Underhill, with a rapid expansion of housing and the need for one school addition after another.

### ***The 21st century***

As we enter the new century, the population of Underhill is about 3000, five times more than its lowest number of 600 in the early '60s. But the population is no longer rapidly growing and the school population has experienced decline. With excess school facilities in both Underhill and Jericho, the opportunity to redress the historical legacy of the Underhill ID school problem may be at hand.

Meanwhile, Underhill enters the new era with a refurbished Town Hall, a new Town Garage, a new Town Park, a Conservation District, many fine new bridges and improved roads. It shares with Jericho a thriving new memorial library and a new, well-appointed building for the Underhill-Jericho Volunteer Fire Department ( which celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2003) . The Mills Riverside Park , also shared by the two towns, is a splendid addition to the communities and is used for all manner of activities: picnicking ,camping, concerts, sports practice, farmers' market , bird watching. It is soon to have a useful covered pavilion, courtesy of the local Lions Club.

In spite of the great increase in town population, the pressures of commuting and the social draw of Burlington, Underhill has managed to preserve a sense of community. There is good attendance at Town Meeting and volunteer service, long a town tradition, continues to thrive. The projections for future population growth in the county are alarming for Underhill as it carries its role as steward of the gateway to Mt Mansfield. Needless to say, the challenges ahead are many.

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Many demographic data on Underhill can be found at:

[http://maps.vcgi.org/indicators/cfhome/town\\_profile.cfm?Call\\_Program=INDICATORS&Profile\\_Town=Underhill](http://maps.vcgi.org/indicators/cfhome/town_profile.cfm?Call_Program=INDICATORS&Profile_Town=Underhill) A few highlights are reported here.

### ***Population growth 1990 – 2000 in %***

Underhill	Jericho	Chittenden C.	Vermont	USA
6.1	16.6	10.1	8.2	13.1

The difference with neighboring towns is remarkable. While Jericho grew more than Chittenden and even more than the nation, Underhill's growth was low, even below the average for Vermont.

### ***Median yearly household income in 1999***

Underhill	Jericho	Chittenden C.	Vermont	USA
70.000	74.000	59.000	49.000	50.000

With this income level, Underhill is estimated to be in the 30 percentile in the USA.  
(The US Census tables do not report percentiles)

### ***Home prices in 2002***

	Underhill	Chittenden C.	Vermont
Median	166.000	176.000	135.000
Average	201.000	204.000	161.000

House prices in Underhill are above the Vermont average, but below those in Chittenden County.

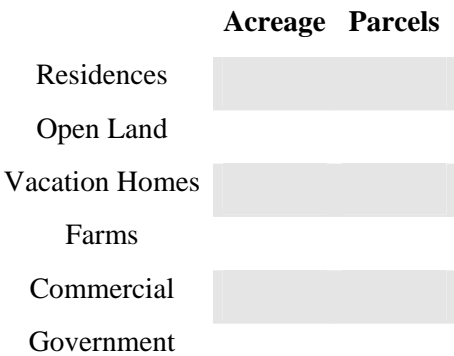
### ***Number of houses***

Houses with less than 6 acres	548
Houses with more than 6 acres	501
Vacation houses	26
Farms	4
Total	1,079

### ***Mobility***

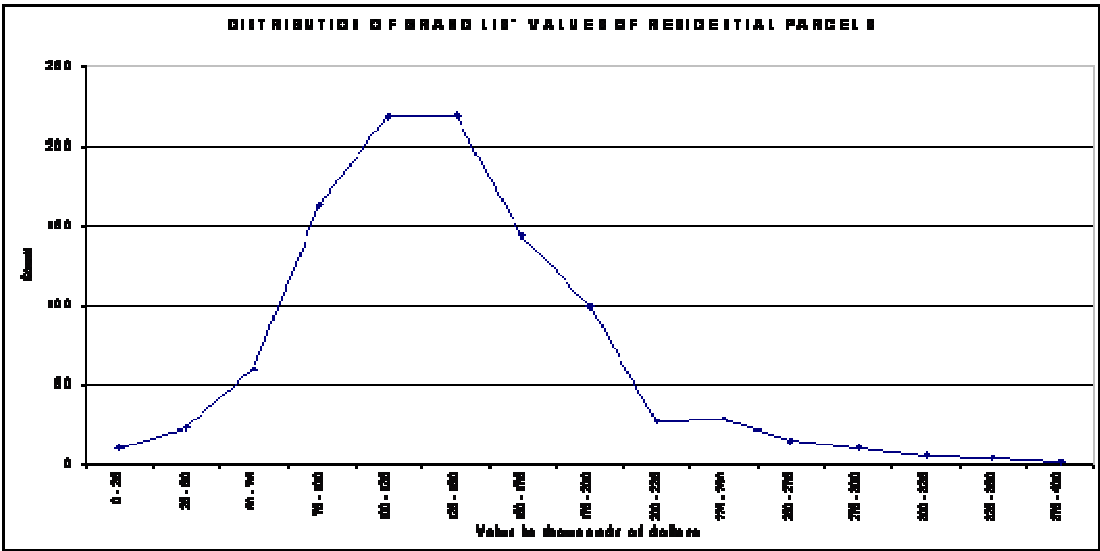
The mobility of Underhill residents is below the national average. In 2000, about one third of residents did not live in Underhill 5 years before. Mobility in the USA, measured in the same way was 46%. Of the new residents, 50% came from elsewhere in Chittenden County, 10% from elsewhere in Vermont, 40% from another state and 1% from outside the US.

**Land Use in 2003 in %**[\[JdV1\]](#)



**Values of parcels with houses in 1998**

[\[JdV2\]](#)



# TOWN FACILITIES AND SERVICES

## ***Recreational facilities***

Underhill provides many opportunities for recreation outdoors.

### **State Forest**

Towering above the town is the Mt. Mansfield State Park which includes the Underhill State Park at the end of Mountain Road. Facilities include:

- An extensive camp ground with lean-tos, tent sites, laundry, and hot showers,
- A network of trails, including a part of the Long Trail
- Taylor and Butler shelters, overnight camping facilities located on the Long Trail,
- Twin Brooks Tenting Area on the Long Trail.

Booklets and maps showing the trail system on the mountain are available in local stores.

### **Proctor Maple Research Farm**

Proctor Maple Research Farm, a satellite laboratory of UVM near the State Park is open to the public for walking and skiing.

### **Mills Riverside Park**

The Mills Riverside Park in Jericho and Underhill is open between dusk and dawn. Its fields provide space to outdoor sporting and other events, while the forest provides walking, hiking and ski trails. See the Town Annual Report for an overview of activities and plans.

### **Pleasant Valley**

The Pleasant Valley corridor is popular with cyclists and tourists, especially during foliage season. Several guidebooks present the loop Pleasant Valley—Route 15 as a bicycle tour.

### **Crane Brook Area**

The Crane Brook Area is popular for hiking, biking, skiing, and riding. The town owns 95 acres.

### **Ethan Allen Firing Range**

The Ethan Allen Firing Range is a large tract of federally-owned land utilized by the Vermont Army National Guard for military training and by General Dynamics Armament Systems for weapons testing. The parcel contains a host of natural resources typical of Vermont. Though the property is normally off-limits to civilians, the grounds have been open on special occasions. Its biathlon course and other cross-country ski trails are used for training student groups and Olympic teams.

### **Tennis courts and swimming pool**

The town maintains a recreation area at the corner of Stevensville and Pleasant Valley Roads. There is a swimming pond, there are two tennis courts and picnic facilities, all managed by the Recreation Committee. A lifeguard is hired for the summer and swimming lessons are provided for young children. When possible, the pond is used for skating.

### **Sledding**

Casey's Hill on Pleasant Valley Road affords outstanding sledding. A snow fence prevents dangerous sliding toward the Mountain Road. See the Annual Report for some rules.

### **Fishing**

Streams with unlimited access for fishing are ubiquitous.

### **Facilities at the schools**

The recreation field at the Underhill Central School and the contiguous fields of the Browns River and ID Schools are used intensively for various sports. In the winter the gym in the Brown River School is available for basketball, volleyball and fitness programs.

### **Meeting places**

The Town Hall, the Library and the United Church are meeting places for various organizations and ad-hoc gatherings.

## ***Library***

The Underhill-Jericho Library District was formed in 1996. Funds were raised to construct a new memorial library to honor Deborah Rawson, a former resident. Her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Burnett Rawson were the initial contributors, and with their support, the building was finished and dedicated in January of 1998. Through the library's computer network specific books may be borrowed from other libraries throughout the State and users can access the Internet. The "home card" system allows members to borrow at eleven other nearby libraries. The Library Report in the Town Annual Report gives current information.

## ***Health Care***

Many Underhill residents use the Family Practice Associates in Cambridge. The building houses five doctors, two nurse practitioners, a dentist, an eye doctor, a physical therapist and two mental health practitioners. In the other direction, the nearest health services are in Essex Junction, a 20-minute drive away. Underhill has access to the Fletcher-Allen Health Care Facility, with campuses at the former Fanny Allen Hospital in Colchester and the Mary Fletcher and DeGoesbriand units in Burlington. A dental office in Jericho East is shared by two dentists.

## ***Veterinarians***

Animal hospitals in Jeffersonville, Jericho and Essex provide care for small domestic animals. Care for large animals is provided in Burlington, Morrisville and Stowe.

## ***Water and Septic Systems***

The Jericho-Underhill Water District serves the Underhill Flats population and maintains a network of fire hydrants. See the Town Annual Report for the current activities and plans. Privately managed water systems exist on Beartown Road in Underhill Center and on Timber Ridge Road off Poker Hill Road.

The Roaring Brook community operates a common water and septic system, the operation of which is reported to the State and the Town respectively. All other water and septic systems are private. Newer bylaws disallow shared septic systems.

After July 1, 2007 state rules will regulate permits for septic systems.

For information contact [www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/www/Engserv.htm](http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/www/Engserv.htm)

## ***Solid Waste Disposal***

Since 2003, we are part of the Chittenden Solid Waste District with drop-off centers at Richmond, Essex, Hinesburg, Milton, South Burlington and Williston. All but Hinesburg accept bulky items & hazardous waste. The town has a contract with a private hauler for curbside trash collection but people are free to choose another hauler. Payment is per trash bag. Recycling is mandatory. Containers with recyclables may be set out with the bag at no extra cost. Residents must properly prepare their recyclables (i.e., remove labels, rinse out jars) and use the recycle bins only for items accepted by the operator. A hazardous waste collection vehicle travels through the County from April to November. For rules and phone numbers, see the Annual Report.

## ***Electricity and Telephone***

Electricity is provided by Central Vermont Public Service and Vermont Electric Coop.

Three-phase power is available in the Flatts.

Verizon maintains the local phonelines. They run a fiber optic cable along VT 15. Long distance telephone service is available through several commercial providers. The closest cell tower is on Mount Mansfield. TV cable is available on parts of the major roads.

## ***Police, Emergency Services, Fire Protection***

The Town currently contracts with the Vermont State Police for 25 hours of coverage a week. Essex Junction and Cambridge support ambulance services.

The volunteer Underhill-Jericho Fire Department provides fire protection. There are two stations; one on Route 15 in Underhill Flats, the other on Browns Trace Road in Jericho Center. Where hydrants are not available, water must be transported by tanker trucks or pumped from local ponds and streams. The department has mutual assistance agreements with other Chittenden County municipalities and the Vermont Air National Guard.

See the Town Annual Report for budget and last year activities.

## ***Post Offices***

The offices in Underhill Center and Underhill Flatts provide counter service and postboxes. The latter office handles rural delivery for the whole area.

## ***Town properties***

The Annual Report lists all town properties. The main properties are:

### **Town Hall**

The Underhill Town Hall, built as a church in 1850, is designated an historic landmark. In the early 1970s it was extensively restored with volunteer help and funding by the Underhill Historical Society. In 2000 it was renovated again to provide additional meeting and office space, a kitchen, another safe for record storage, and an elevator for handicap accessibility.

The hall upstairs can be used for public and private functions.

Town Meetings are held at the auditorium of the Browns River Middle School.

### **Public Works Department**

The Public Works Department repairs and maintains the town roads, bridges and culverts. Their work includes snow removal, cold patching, re-grading, and re-treatment of the roads. The Department is housed in a new facility at the old Town Landfill site on New Road. Salt and sand for the roads are stored at the site. They operate four dump trucks, a grader, a loader, an excavator, a smaller dump truck and plows and wings.

### **Town Hall Park**

Relocation of the Town garage created a 1.75 acre open space opposite Town Hall.

In 2003, the area was landscaped under auspices of the Conservation Commission.

## ***Cemeteries***

All Underhill cemeteries were established before 1875. Irish Settlement Cemetery, Doran Cemetery on Pleasant Valley Road and St. Thomas Cemetery on Range Road serve Underhill's Catholic community. The latter is more often used, but there is ample room at all three sites. North Underhill Cemetery on Poker Hill Road, Underhill Cemetery on Park Street and Deane Road Cemetery are non-denominational. Sand Hill Cemetery in Underhill Center is no longer active but is an historical site, with burials dating back to 1810.

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADJACENT TOWNS**

### **Jericho**

The relationship between Underhill and Jericho is unusual. In many ways the two towns function as one. Not only do the towns share jurisdiction over the Underhill Flats area, they share the I.D. School District, Browns River Middle School, Mt. Mansfield Union High School, the Jericho-Underhill Water District, the Underhill-Jericho Fire Department, the Jericho-Underhill Land Trust, the Deborah Rawson Library and State Police coverage. The Mills Riverside Park is utilized by residents of both communities.

Local churches serve members from both towns. Several local organizations, for instance the Jeri-Hill Senior Citizens group, the Lions Club and the Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops have members from both towns.

### **Cambridge**

Directly across our border on VT 15 is the Cambridge Industrial Park. It offers direct access to VT 15, utilities and room for expansion. Any plans for commercial/ industrial development in Underhill face competition from this well established industrial park. Residents in the northern part of the Underhill diamond tend to shop, bank and attend church in Cambridge.

Sugarbush Farm, which straddles the Underhill/Cambridge border in Pleasant Valley, is administered by the American Farmland Trust.

### **Bolton**

Although Underhill and Bolton share a boundary on the map, there is no longer a direct road between the two towns. In 1926, when the Federal government purchased the Ethan Allen Firing Range, the roads connecting both towns were cut off and certain population centers abandoned. The common interests between Bolton and Underhill are membership in the Mt. Mansfield Union School District, representation in the Legislature and the future of the firing range.

### **Westford**

There is no easy access between Underhill and the town center of Westford. Earlier roads across the hills separating the towns have long since been discontinued. In North Underhill there is a road connecting the towns in a roundabout way. A flat section of Westford along VT 15 may be developed in the future.

### **Stowe**

Underhill and Stowe share Mt. Mansfield; the boundary is along the crest of the mountain. Many years ago there existed a Town of Mansfield, mostly on the crest of the mountain. It was later dissolved and the land was divided between Stowe and Underhill. The road that at one time connected the towns through Nebraska Notch to Moscow is today a hiking trail.

Sometimes the lights for night skiing at Stowe illuminate the sky over the mountain.

### **Essex**

Essex abuts Underhill peripherally at the shared four-corner point where Jericho, Westford, Essex and Underhill meet. Essex is nonetheless a dominating town, where many Underhill residents work and shop. It also provides vital services such as the Essex Vocational Center, Brownell Library, public bus and rail, Essex Rescue and the Immediate Care and Occupational Health & Rehabilitation facility.



# **MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE**

## ***Legislative representation***

Underhill, Jericho and Bolton share Vermont Legislative District #3. Two state representatives are elected to the Vermont House of Representatives to serve that constituency. As a municipality of Chittenden County, Underhill contributes to electing six county representatives to the Vermont State Senate.

## ***Elected boards***

### **Selectboard**

The Town of Underhill is managed by a three member legislative body elected during the annual March Town Meetings and serving for three-year staggered terms. The primary responsibilities of the Selectboard are to plan and oversee maintenance of the roads, to draft a town budget and set the tax rate, and to provide for the general health and welfare of the community. The Selectboard also appoints the members of Town commissions. The budget is presented at Town Meeting for approval by the voters.

### **Board of Civil Authority**

The eleven member Board of Civil Authority, including the Selectboard and Town Clerk, validates the voter checklist before each election and assists in counting votes. In addition, the board hears appeals of property appraisals and must view each property in question. All three elected Selectboard members serve on the board. The remaining members are elected at the biennial caucuses of the Democratic and Republican Parties—in the same year that the governor is elected. Three members of each party are elected. Further, an additional member is elected from the party of the elected governor. The Town Clerk serves as the clerk of the board; in addition, the Town Clerk has the power to cast a vote in the event of a tie vote on the board. The seven elected members (not the Selectboard) serve as Justices of the Peace.

### **Board of Trustees for the Water District**

The Water District is managed by a three-member board of Trustees elected by the residents served by the system.

## ***Town commissions***

### **Planning Commission**

The Planning Commission consists of nine members appointed by the Selectboard for four year staggered terms. The primary task of the commission is to prepare the town plan and oversee its implementation. They formulate the Subdivision Regulations and Zoning Bylaws, approve subdivisions and prepare the capital budget.

### **Zoning Board**

A nine member Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) is appointed by the Selectboard for staggered three year terms. There are nine members. The Zoning Board hears and decides on appeals of decisions of the Zoning Administrator and requests for conditional use according to the Zoning Bylaws. The Board suggests changes to the regulations for consideration by the Planning Commission.

### **Conservation Commission**[\[JdV3\]](#)

The nine members Conservation Commission is appointed by the Selectboard for 4-year staggered terms. Their mission is to promote the wise use of natural resources; to encourage and facilitate community awareness of and responsibility for the balance among growth, resource preservation and aesthetic considerations, and to provide education and resources to promote the practice of conservation principles.

### **Recreation Commission**

The commission oversees maintenance of the town pond and the tennis courts and sledding on Casey's Hill.

### **Historical Society** [\[JdV4\]](#)

The Underhill Historical Society has been active for many years. It raised the funds for the restoration of the Town Hall. It undertook the restoration of the historic District #5 School in Underhill Center. It has published a town history and raises funds through the sale of materials with photos and drawings of historic buildings in Underhill. It conducts tours of buildings on the historic register and presents educational programs related to the history of the town.

## ***Town Staff***

### **Town Clerk**

The Town Clerk is elected for a 3 year term at the March Town Meeting. The duties of the office include the maintenance of the town land records; overseeing elections; maintaining the voter checklist; and issuing licenses for which the town has authority. personnel

### **Town Treasurer**

The Treasurer is elected for a 3-year term at the March Town Meeting and handles the collection of taxes, banking and accounting for both the Town and the Underhill Central School District, serving also as the delinquent tax collector. The Town is on a fiscal year, starting July first. Taxes are billed annually in July and collected quarterly in August, November, February and May.

### **Town Administrator**

The Selectboard hires the Town Administrator who serves as assistant to the Selectboard, helps to co-ordinate information among the commissions, and as acts as the town Sewage Officer.

### **Zoning and Planning Administrator**

The Zoning and Planning Administrator, appointed for a three-year term by the Planning Commission with approval of the Legislative body, is responsible for issuing building permits, and enforcing the Underhill town bylaws and ordinances. The Administrator also serves the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Planning Commission.

### **Listers**

The three listers are elected at the annual March Town Meeting for three-year staggered terms. They are responsible for appraising property and maintaining the Grand List.

### **Town Constable**

The Town Constable is elected for a three year term at the appropriate March Town Meeting. The primary task is to serve legal papers.

### **Animal Control Officer**

The Animal Control Officer is responsible for enforcing the dog control ordinance

## **Public Works Department**

Underhill roads are maintained by a full time crew of four, including the foreman. The crew is hired by and reports to the Selectboard.

## **Health Officer**

The Vermont Commissioner of Health appoints the Health Officer on the recommendation of the Selectboard. The Underhill Board of Health may also recommend the Health Officer and appoint deputy officers. The Board of Health and the Health Officer are responsible for protecting the town against the cause, spread and development of disease.

## ***Town Plan***

A town plan serves various functions:

### **Information**

It tells where the town is heading on the issues that are within its jurisdiction. It is the basis for the dialogue between town representatives and the people they serve.

### **Coordination**

It helps to coordinate decision-making. It allows residents, developers, adjacent communities, and regional agencies to take the plans of Underhill into account when they make their own plans.

### **Legislation**

The town plan is the basis for all town regulations and the guideline for their interpretation. Our state legislature requires that all municipalities have a valid town plan in order to enact any new regulations. When town decisions face legal challenge, the courts determine whether the town decisions are consistent with its own plan and regulations and in line with higher order regulations.

## ***Regulatory tools***

The Vermont Statutes define the areas that fall under the jurisdiction of a town. A town may regulate the use of land and define ordinances for some specific issues.

### **Zoning districts (see map F)**

Underhill distinguishes six districts, each with a specific purpose and particular regulations. See the chapter “Land Use Plan” in the Town Plan for the definitions of the districts.

### **Subdivision regulations**

Subdivision Regulations specify per district (zone) the criteria for decisions on subdivision requests. Subdivision rules define the procedures, requirements and specifications for the submission, processing and design of a parcel. Agreements on a subdivision are recorded on a ‘plat’ or Mylar, a detailed and certified map of a parcel.

For specifics, see the Underhill Subdivision Regulations.

### **Zoning regulations**

Zoning Regulations specify requirements per district:

- Particular uses of land
- Dimensions, location, construction, maintenance, alteration and use of structures
- Areas and dimensions of land that may be occupied or must remain unoccupied
- Density of population and intensity of use

For specifics, see the Underhill Zoning Regulations.

## ***Issue-specific regulations*** [\[JdV5\]](#)

The full text of all regulations is available at town hall.

### **Road Policy**

Specifies the construction of all driveways and roads and defines the maintenance of town roads.

### **Sewage Ordinance**

Defines requirements pertaining to the installation of septic systems.

### **Solid Waste Management Regulations**

Conveys the rules for the trash collection for which the town contracts.

### **Domestic Pet Ordinance**

Aims to control the nuisance caused by some dogs.

### **Nuisance Ordinance**

Sets the limits for common residential nuisances such as excessive noise, objectionable lighting, objectionable odors and accumulation of junk.

### **Telecommunication Facilities Ordinance**

Specifies the local requirements for telecommunication towers.

### **Scenic road ordinance**

Defines maintenance, reconstruction and modification of scenic roads. To be reinstated.

## **LIST OF MAPS**

All maps can be examined in a size of 3 by 5 feet at Town Hall.

Smaller maps are available at cost price; \$3 for all maps, \$0.50 for a single map.

Ed Moore revised and donated all maps, using state-of-the-art mapping software.

### **A. Education**

Shows the Jericho-Underhill Incorporated District and the location of the schools

### **B. Transportation**

Shows all roads with their name and classification

### **C. Utilities & Facilities**

Shows the location of the town utilities & facilities

### **D. Current Land Use**

Shows the current use of each parcel.

### **E. Zoning Districts**

Delineates the Zoning Districts.

### **F. Natural Resources**

Shows the location of natural resources

## WEBSITES

Agency: Vermont Planning Information Center, a collaborative of various organizations  
Objective: Provide information for town planning and regulation  
Service: Provide overview of resources for town planning  
Website: <http://www.vpic.info/>

Agency: Vermont Indicators Online, a collaborative of various organizations  
Objective: Distribute social, economic, and natural resource data electronically  
Service: Provide first-stop shopping of statistical data for Vermont  
Website: <http://maps.vcgi.org/indicators/>

Agency: UVM Center for Rural Studies  
Objective: The Vermont data center for the US. Census Bureau  
Service: Provide a variety of data  
Website: <http://crs.uvm.edu/>

Agency: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission  
Objective: Support towns in the region in planning their future  
Service: Provide information and coordination of various planning issues  
Website: <http://www.ccrpcvt.org/>

Agency: Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs  
Objective: Support sustainable development of Vermont communities  
Service: Provide grants, advice, training, publications for a wide range of planning issues  
Website: <http://www.dhca.state.vt.us/index.htm>

Agency: Vermont Center for Geographic Information  
Objective: Provide digital geographic data  
Service: Interactive maps, data standards, advice & training  
Website: <http://www.vcgi.org/>

Agency: Various Housing Agencies  
Objective: Provide housing and economic information  
Service: Information and database on housing, both market rate and affordable  
Website: <http://www.housingdata.org/>

Agency: US Census Bureau  
Objective: Provide demographic data  
Service: Popular tables and maps for the U.S., states, counties, cities, towns  
Website: <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet>

Agency: Vermont Department of Taxes  
Objective: Collect taxes  
Service: Provide income & tax statistics per town  
Website: <http://www.state.vt.us/tax/statistics.htm>

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

[\[JdV6\]](#)

### **Preserving the landscape**

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“Hands on the land - A History of the Vermont Landscape”; Jan Albers, 2000

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### **Soils**

“Soil Survey of Chittenden County, Vermont”, US Department of Agricultural Soil Conservation Service, Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation, 1974.

### **Hydrology**

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### **The Natural Resources of Underhill:**

Hagerman, R.L. “Mansfield , the Story of Vermont’s Loftiest Mountain”, Essex Publishing Co. Inc. Essex Junction, Vermont, 1971.

“Jericho Natural Resources Advisory Committee Report”, Rettig, Mary, Chairman, Jericho, Vermont, 1988.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Thus, the inscription on the monument to the Brown Family (Jericho’s legendary first settlers) outside Browns River Middle School. Their story of tragedy and survival was not atypical of the area and era.

<sup>[2]</sup> See map “Surficial Geology”.

<sup>[3]</sup> Actually, the very first cash industry was probably the making of potash (crude potassium) used in glass, soap, and gunpowder manufacture. Before the arrival of the first local sawmill in 1820, the earliest settlers must have followed the common pioneer practices of simply burning the cleared timber and transporting the refined woodash in barrels to market. Curiously, though, U.S. Censuses before 1820 record no potash making in Underhill. Instead, they show weaving (of linen, wool and southern cotton) as the leading cash industry in town. The leading agricultural commodity was maple sugar.

<sup>[4]</sup> The CCC was a public works project organized with quasi-military discipline. It enlisted young unemployed men from all over the country, providing food, clothing, barracks housing, rewarding physical labor in the out-of-doors and money to send home to needy families. Some living participants still remember the program with nostalgia and gratitude.

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[\[JdV1\]](#) Carolyn will update

[\[JdV2\]](#) Carolyn will update

[\[JdV3\]](#) The VSA requires a CC. to do what we now propose in our plan.

[\[JdV4\]](#) Is it still alive or is it history?

[\[JdV5\]](#) Who enforces?

Mention the date of last revision

[\[JdV6\]](#) Refer also to specific Underhill reports such as Town Annual Reports, previous Town plans, the booklet with Underhill history.